DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 393 051 CG 026 880

AUTHOR Moffett, Patrick Sean
TITLE Promoting Agency among Children and Adolescents at the Margins.
PUB DATE 15 Aug 95
NOTE 17p.; Invited Address presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (103rd, New York, NY, August 15, 1995).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; *Children; *Community Characteristics; Community Development; Cultural Pluralism; Foreign Countries; *Homeless People; Locus of Control; *Motivation; Self Determination; Self Efficacy; Social Integration; Social Structure
IDENTIFIERS *Agency Theory; *Boys Town Urban Program; Italy

ABSTRACT

Founded in response to the needs of children left homeless in Italy in the wake of World War II, Boys' and Girls' Towns have become international communities of children and adolescents separated from their families or homelands because of domestic violence, famine, war or other forms of social upheaval. The towns have been less subject to many of the trends in social policy that significantly transformed and eventually closed most of the larger institutions for homeless children Challenged with responsibility for themselves and for the building up of the community, the young people of the towns have produced a constitutional government which continues to evolve; a financial system with taxes, savings accounts, fines and unemployment insurance; a judicial system with trials, a penal code, bar exams, lawyers, and public defenders; and commissioners of public works, sanitation, and labor. Based on personal observation, this paper presents a psychological perspective on the Boys' Town of Rome's citizens response to the numerous challenges they face, and invites reflection on their capacity to be agents in their own development. Examples are presented to illustrate forms of motivation related to propriate striving, personal causation, Locus of Control, perceived self-efficacy, resiliency, and agency. A detailed "Gradient of Belonging" is appended. Contains 16 references. (RB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 393 051

PROMOTING AGENCY

AMONG CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS AT THE MARGINS

by

Patrick Sean Moffett, CFC, Ph.D.
Boys' and Girls' Towns of Italy

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN **OTHER THAN PAPER COPY** HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

P. Moffett

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Invited Address presented at the
103rd Annual Convention of the
American Psychological Association
New York, New York
Hilton Hotel - Rendezvous Trianon
11:00 am Tuesday, August 15, 1995

For more information contact:
P. S. Moffett, CFC, President
Boys' Towns of Italy, Inc.
250 East 63 Street
New York, NY 10021
Tel: 212/980-8770
Fax: 212/644-0766

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CG026880

PROMOTING AGENCY AMONG CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS AT THE MARGINS

Boys' Town of Rome: May 1995

It was late Saturday night. The younger boys were asleep and the older fellows were closing the books or turning off the TV. A call came from the director asking me to come to his office. There an oriental boy was seated, stoically avoiding eye contact with the three uniformed policemen who were presenting his non-story. They had picked him up in midmorning at the scene of a crime in which they now realized he had no part. He was without identification papers and having indicated that he did not know the language gave no responses to their interrogation other than to make very clear that he would like to be released. He had refused all offers of food and drink, and to the amazement of the officers, had not even gone to the bathroom all day long.

They and he were visibly exhausted. Because a medical doctor had placed the boy at 16-17 years of age, the police could release him only to his parents or to a court appointed guardian. The alternative would have been the emergency youth hostels; however these were all at full capacity for reasons we were to learn the next day.

The director had just clarified to the officers, who thought their job now done, that Boys' Town, being a fully independent institution not subject to court placements, would not consider the admission unless it were freely requested by the boy himself.

Once separated from the police, the boy confided to a Chinese man on the Boys' Town staff that he and his family were illegal aliens and that any information he might give to the officials could put them in difficulty. He was prepared to go to jail if necessary to protect them. A call to an understanding judge resulted in the police entrusting the minor to Boys' Town, all, including the judge, police, staff and the boy himself, knowing that he would be on the first bus out in the morning, taking full advantage of the open door policy.

At breakfast Zon was quite talkative, his Italian having developed remarkably during the night. He was off to the center of Rome before his police friends arrived with two Albanian youngsters. This time the officers were dressed in civilian clothes and in an unmarked car. They carried a letter of presentation from the same judge asking that Boys' Town consider a request for admission of Rudy, aged 15, and Karl, aged 12, unaccompanied refugees who had been begging on the streets of Rome and sleeping under a small bridge in the Borghese Gardens.

A few of the Boys' Town citizens from Albania and ex-Yugoslavia helped unravel the story. It seems the police had become aware of a significant increase in the number of minors on the street corners, washing car windows, selling lighters or simply begging. A blitz had revealed a rather sophisticated operation in which boys 10 to 14 years old, organized into small groups under the direction of older adolescents, were skillfully working the streets. The boys believed -- and perhaps it was the truth -- that sixty percent of what they earned each day was being forwarded by the "Fagans" to their very needy families in Albania. Rather than being "marginal" in any sense of the

word, these children and adolescents were active agents with a stimulating project, filled with personal significance and rooted in a deep sense of belonging. While Boys' Town became quite active in reuniting them with their families, it did not offer them the possibility of admission.

"Billy" on the other hand, did become a Boys' Town citizen. His gang was not quite as altruistic. Any night he came back with less than his daily quota (about seventy-five dollars), the backs of his hands were burned with cigarettes. His story led to the arrest of those who had gathered into a modern day slavery, truly marginal children, long separated from any family they might have had in such a way that tracing might take years.

Billy's fellow citizens, aside from other "stranieri" who have found their way to Rome from the world's troubled spots, are Italian youngsters who have arrived at the final step of a social service system that places the first priority on direct assistance to a family in difficulty, then considers the possibilities for adoption, tries one or two foster family placements and/or small group homes, and then, as a last resort, a residential youth community.

Founded by Monsignor J. P. Carroll-Abbing in response to the needs of children left homeless in Italy in the wake of World War II, the Boys' and Girls' Towns of Italy have become international communities for children and adolescents separated from their families or homelands because of domestic violence, famine, war or other forms of social upheaval. Independently operated and privately financed, in a country that afforded considerable flexibility to the private sector with respect to government regulations, the "towns" have been less affected by many of the trends in social policy that significantly transformed and eventually closed most of the larger institutions for homeless children.

Ten years ago, I was invited to take a good look at the Boys' and Girls' Towns of Italy as multi-cultural, youth communities with a long experience in a methodology that might be applicable in other parts of the world where large numbers of homeless children are living in marginal situations.

Here generations of young people have grown up in a reality that is well-described by its name. The young citizens of Boys' Town have been challenged with responsibility for themselves and for the building up of the community.

They have produced a constitutional government which continues to evolve, a financial system with taxes, saving accounts, fines and unemployment insurance, a judicial system with trials, a penal code, bar exams, lawyers and public defenders, commissioners of public works, sanitation, and labor.

The response to this challenge on the part of boys and girls, from even the most dysfunctional of situations, invites reflection on their impressive capacity to be agents in their own development. The Boys' Town of Rome, in particular, serves as a powerful illustration of forms of motivation that have received attention under such concepts as Propriate Striving, Personal Causation, Locus of Control, Perceived Self-Efficacy, and AGENCY.

(1) AGENCY AND MARGINALITY (A THEORETICAL-PHILOSOPHICAL ASIDE)

"Has Psychology a Future?" was the question that Eleanor J. Gibson put to herself in one of the last of her very significant contributions to the field in which she had invested much of her life, energy and enthusiasm. Having explained her difficulties with dualism, reductionism and nature-nurture dichotomy, she presented an agenda for psychology organized around what she described as the "hallmarks of human behavior." "These fundamental properties of human behavior are the ones that we, as psychologists, need to account for. They are our subject matter." (Gibson, 1994). Agency (the self in control) tops her list.

She links the concept of agency to an 1879 William James paper entitled, "Are We Automata?" (James, 1879). A quarter of a century ago, Mary Henle and a number of the philosophical-psychologists of the New School guided me through a tracing of agency from the then emerging theories of Achievement Motivation, Personal Causation, Locus of Control and Perceived Self-Efficacy through a sampling of some of the philosophical roots of the concept in works from Ricoeur, Mandelbaum and Kohler, back to Spinoza, Aquinas and Aristotle (Moffett, 1972).

Agency has become a recurrent issue in **American Psychologist** articles and commentary where it is treated in the rich complexity of the philosophical issues that surround it. Agency is also receiving coverage in a body of investigation linked to a David Bakan (1966) paper in which "agency" and "communion" were presented as relatively distinct modalities of human behavior, one more typically masculine and the other feminine. In an article in **Psychological Bulletin**, Vicki Helgeson offers a helpful definition of the terms as they are being used in this research:

> "Agency reflects one's existence as an individual and communion reflects the participation of the individual in a larger organism of which the individual is a part. Agency includes self-protection, self-assertion, self-expansion, self-control and self-direction, and emphasizes the forming of separations. Communion includes group participation, cooperation, attachment, and connections, and emphasizes the creation of unions. (Helgeson, 1994)"

Just as Zon, Rudy and Karl were not candidates for Boys' Town, so these definitions are not what is meant by "agency" in this presentation. I will be working from a more inclusive sense of the term in which intended community building behaviors are very much an expression of the "agency" of boys and girls, young women and young men.

From infancy, humans engage in activities that suggest intentionality. When we begin to speak, we communicate what we want to do and, in time, we explain why. Such intended engagement in activities that help to shape who I am and who I am becoming is what is meant by "AGENCY" in the title of today's presentation.

Gordon Allport (1955) in his classic work **Becoming** describes these behaviors as "propriate striving" -- the engagement in activities and projects highly consistent with an emerging sense of self. I choose to do that which is appropriate for me -- appropriate perhaps because it feels good, or because others have convinced me that it is good for me, or because I associate it with people who represent the me I would like to be.

In 1982 at age 80, Erik Erikson returned to the issue of identification, describing a lifelong developmental movement from "I" to "we."

> "From here we could once more follow the stages of development and study the way in which in given languages, the fatherhoods and motherhoods, the sisterhoods and brotherhoods of the "we" come to share a joined identity experienced as most real. But here also it is necessary to amend the very concept of a reality which . . . . is all too often seen as an "outer world" to be adjusted to. (Erikson, 1982)"

Our focus today is on the psychological and contemporaneous life space (Lewin, 1956) of the agent -- that which has existence for the individual in the here and now. While we will be considering outer contexts that foster growth, the real domain of concern is the adolescent's experience of self as an individual who "belongs" to significant reference groups -- this family, this sex, this race, this nation, this peer group, this community, etc. When I speak of children and adolescents "AT THE MARGINS," I am referring primarily to their psychological experience of not fully "belonging" to reference groups that have, or could have, particular significance for the individual. For this reason some children who in given sociological contexts would appear quite "marginal" (e.g., Zon, Rudi and Karl) will be excluded from the discussion.

(2) ENTERING THE TOWN

The Boys' Town of Rome is located at the center of its own two hundred twenty-five acre farm on the edge of the city. Visitors are struck by the beauty and spaciousness of the environment -- suggesting a small village or a college campus opening to vistas of vineyards and olive groves, playing fields and pastures. Along the tree shaded lanes of the town, one passes a variety of structures -- none very large, all rather appropriate for their use: two banks, a general store, two churches, three schools, laboratories, the various villas where the boys live, etc. At the very center of the town is the covered amphitheater that houses the thrice weekly assemblies of the citizens.

Admission decisions are based on the answers to a few simple questions: Is it clear that the applicant cannot live with the family of origin? Have other alternatives such as adoption or foster care been considered or tried? What does this youngster need to do to grow toward healthful maturity? Does Boys' Town offer the resources that will enable the applicant to do what he needs to do?

Those accepted are usually between 10 and 16 years of age. If there are any mental or physical handicaps, they should be of a nature that would not preclude active participation in the self-government processes. The family situation is such that there is little hope of family re-entry within the year. All concerned, and especially the youngster himself, are aware that the admission decision is motivated by the state of the family rather than any behavior or misbehavior on the part of the boy -- admission cannot be earned nor imposed. It must be requested or at least freely accepted by the boy himself.

There are two sections to the Boys' Town of Rome. Garden City is home to thirty boys between the ages of 10 and 14. The older fellows, ages 14-21, live in Industrial City, where the population ranges between 70 and 110, depending on admission pressures, reunification programs, and world conditions. Each section elects its own mayor who in turn appoints the commissioners of finance, school and labor, sanitation, and recreational activities. At Garden City the town meetings, led by the mayor, are held each evening. At Industrial City the citizens gather in assembly three nights a week. There are no orientation sessions for new citizens, participation in the assemblies is itself an education in the constitutional government of the community.

The cashing of daily paychecks in Garden City introduces the citizen to the financial system. Eventually he might choose to have a more active role in the management of the economy by seeking a job in the bank or town store. Fines imposed for transgressions of the rules established by the assembly might provoke a special interest in knowing more about the legal system. The Chief Justice, also elected by the citizens, offers courses in the Constitution as well as the Procedural and Penal Codes of the town, all leading to a bar exam and a license as a lawyer. The Constitution currently specifies that the mayor be elected every two months, at which point all appointed positions are reopened thus offering considerable opportunity for advancement in the various career paths.

Such a system of self-government displaces some of the more usual organizational, disciplinary, teaching and counseling functions of child-care workers. The adults of the community are challenged to find other ways of being available to youngsters who are very much in need of forming significant relationships with mature individuals who might serve as role models, parental figures, sparring partners or friends.

(3) CONTEXTS OF GROWTH (ATTENDING TO THE HERE AND NOW)

Staff in-service workshops focus on ways of being present, of nurturing helpful relationships, of attending to the here and now of the adolescent's emerging sense of self. The articulation of a "gradient of belonging" (Moffett, 1987, 1991) has proved particularly useful in providing staff members with a means of exchanging perspectives on the investment of the adolescent in the life of the community.

This gradient is described in more detail on the appended sheets, What is noted is a progressive incorporation from initial acceptance, toward increased participation, authentic engagement and eventual ownership. I invite you at this moment to do a bit of introspection on your

own sense of belonging in one of the groups of your life space that you might include in a self-description. e.g. In this setting I might allude to my membership in the American Psychological Association, my family, my church, a group of friends, my company, my congregation, my country.

I ask myself, what were some of the signs at the outset suggesting that the group was willing to consider me as a member? What were some of the initial demands on me? What were some of my regular activities as a group member? When did I begin to allude to feeling authentically one of the group? Did I have some doubts about whether this group was right for me? When did I come to a fuller sense of the short comings of the group? Did I actually come to re-choose membership, knowing well that the group had its imperfections? Do I own the group? Do I feel responsible for its existence, for its growth and development, for its future?

Our personal stories have a significant role in shaping many of our perceptions. When I arrived at the Boys' and Girls' Towns of Rome ten years ago, I was coming from a mix of professional involvements that undoubtedly have influenced what I was to see. Children in East Harlem had taught me that many of their "learning disabilities" could be remediated by equipping them with simple techniques of attending and processing which their more successful classmates had picked up without much effort through incidental learning. Teachers attuned to such techniques find them useful with many other students not identified as having learning difficulties.

The dysfunction of some families in care taught me to attend to enmeshment and dissociation issues in family and group situations, where certain individuals experience difficulty entering in, holding on or letting go. It appears that adaptive skills often taken for granted need to be learned. Some families, on the other hand, are masterful in fostering the development of other skills of a very disruptive nature -- well-rehearsed patterns of behavior that are readily transferred to new group situations. Foster families are afforded a unique perspective on the dynamics of the family of origin of the child. A sequence of failed placements often consolidates maladaptive patterns.

At Boys' Town, there are no clinical evaluations performed until after the youngster has been in residence for at least two months. Testing at admission or shortly thereafter was simply revealing the responses of the boy to the dysfunctional situation that had motivated placement. Staff attentive to their own emotive experience of the boy during the first few months, provide highly significant corroborative information on the reports of the social workers familiar with the family of origin and the previous "home" situations.

Another personal predisposition I brought to Boys' Town evolved from my work with members of religious congregations, both those in formation programs and those in moments of vocational transition. The core issue was frequently that of belonging and the appropriateness of fit between a sense of self, an image of religious life, and the expectancies of others. Because these congregations profess a corporate "option for the poor," the members often work with persons in marginal conditions in inner-cities or third world settings. The challenge is one of being at the margins without becoming a "marginal person" (Moffett, 1984). Skills in developing and nurturing a healthful sense of belonging are quite necessary. When they are not part of the "natural virtue" of

the individual, these skills need to be intentionally developed. Work at community building is an essential coping strategy for such individuals.

Given this background it is not surprising that what attracted my attention at Boys' Town were the ways in which the structures and dynamics of the community enable the adolescent to explore and elaborate various forms of belonging.

(4) INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES

"Insieme oggi per costruire il mondo di domani." (Together today to build the world of tomorrow.) Social workers who have followed children from the initial separation from the family of origin through a series of failed foster placements have often expressed amazement and delight at the facility with which these youngsters enter into the life of Boys' Town or Girls' Town. Perhaps it is the series of separations that helped clarify for the youngster the reality of the family situation. "Citizens" attribute their satisfaction to the added space (both physical and emotional), the large selection of persons both peers and adults with which one can interact, the dynamism of the town, their own involvement in the admission decision, the relative permanency of the placement, and the presence of others who share a similar story.

While not underestimating any of these factors, I would like to return in this concluding section to the central theme of the presentation -- the fostering of that agency with which children and adolescents move from a situation of marginality toward a sense of belonging through personal engagement in the building up of an intentional community.

In that phase of the developmental process in which the peer group and the "extended sense of self" gain salience, pre-adolescents become engaged in the process of expanding their primary reference group. A healthy family, well integrated into the larger community, perhaps through family, social, religious, athletic or political involvements, encourages and facilitates this process. Family conversations may become enriched and enlivened by exchanges on whom you met today and who needs to go where tomorrow. On the other hand, responses such as "Out." and "Nothing." to the questions "Where did you go?" and "What did you do?" also suggest a personal investment in the differentiation of social space beyond the nuclear family.

A cohesive family offers a security base for launchings and returns during the initial forays into the larger world. Children from disengaged families tend to move too quickly into situations for which they are not prepared. Those from enmeshed situations may not move at all. Formal and informal community youth organizations are quite useful in the process of reaching out. Some educators have worked very deliberately and effectively at encouraging students to become active participants in the process of transforming their schools into communities of concern. Athletic associations, scouting, church groups, clubs, even street gangs offer contexts which facilitate participation, giving explicit signs of membership and reinforcing movement toward increased engagement and eventual ownership.

Life at the Boys' and Girls' Towns of Italy makes these processes very explicit. The regular processing that takes place in the town assemblies, in court cases, in daily interactions with fellow citizens in the bank, the store, the restaurant or on the streets of the town, all contribute to the sensitization of the adolescent to his own agency in the process of building up the community.

The engagement of the young "citizens" in offering tours of their town to the frequent visitors serves to reinforce their sense of ownership. Professionals who come to observe the town are challenged to reflect on possible extrapolations of the model.

While the Boys' and Girls' Towns of Rome might serve as a prototype for similar youth communities in other parts of the world, such would be improbable in the United States. Here state and local regulations often impose what might be described as a "treatment model" in which the residential group setting is intended to be a therapeutic environment. The child or adolescent is engaged in processes designed to facilitate re-entry into the family of origin or a foster family. Placement necessitates the specification of clinical and behavioral objectives to be attained within a specified time. As in hospital care, the brevity of the "treatment" period is considered a significant positive factor in the evaluation of the intervention.

Although the Boys' and Girls' Towns do offer hospitality to youngsters whose families are in therapy and for whom re-entry is a desired goal, most of those admitted come from situations that do not predict change in the foreseeable future. For them the move into the town is unabashedly long-term. It is a place to grow up, to complete one's schooling, and to learn a trade. The lifelong commitment of a number of very dedicated adults has certainly had a significant role in nurturing and sustaining this environment. Nevertheless they will be the first to point to the "citizens" when asked what makes it work. The interaction, interdependency and collaboration of youngsters at various stages of personal and social development is itself the dynamic field for the propriate striving of each. For example, the welcoming of new citizens often elicits, reveals and reinforces the generative dimensions of ownership that have developed among the older citizens in the course of several years.

Italy has for the past ten years committed itself to a program of "affidamento" based on the motivations that first promoted the foster care system in the United States. "De-institutionalization" is an unchallenged objective. Recently there has been a growing awareness of the utility of group facilities to handle difficult cases. "Treatment" is becoming the expressed goal of "placement." In such a climate, the Boys' Town of Rome is a bit of an anomaly. Factors which have been quite significant in sustaining the operations include the independent funding through charitable donations, the commitment of an international group of educators to the principles of intended communities, the clearly expressed requests of adolescents who find themselves homeless, and the living testimony of former citizens, their wives or husbands, and their children.

A CONCLUDING STORY

Paula was a young art student when she met Franco. He too was an artist, having spent many of his years at Boys' Town developing his skills in the ceramics center. Like many of the former citizens, they were married in the Boys' Town chapel. They rented an old farm house near the coast town where he had his first assignment as an art teacher. There they set up a studio in which they practiced their shared work as sculptors. Last month, Paula and Franco returned with their young daughter for the annual Boys' Town Festa.

At the table, Franco spoke of his students and Paula explained her projects as a member of their local town council. I asked them how their art work was going. Paula knew I was giving her a chance to speak with pride about some commissions they had recently received. She smiled and said with great enthusiasm, "Franco and I were talking in the car on the way here. We are convinced that our real art is our lives and how we are living them." Such is the shared personal agency that engenders belonging.

If I may close with a personal note. I'd like to extend to each of you an invitation. Should your travels bring you to Rome, after you have explored the traces of ancient civilizations, after you've marveled at the artistic treasures and architectural accomplishments of previous centuries, should a few hours remain available -- come to Boys' Town at the edge of the Eternal City. Your presence here today suggests that you, too, will delight in meeting the children whose stories we share. It is the privilege of our profession to attend to the agency with which young people are striving today to build the world of tomorrow.

REFERENCES

Allport, Gordon. (1955). **Becoming**. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Bakan, David. (1966). **The Duality of Human Existence**. Chicago: Rand McNally.

Carroll-Abbing, J.P. (1965). **But for The Grace of God**. New York: Delacorte Press.

Erikson, Erik. (1982). **The Life Cycle Completed**. London: W. W. Norton & Co.

Gibson, Eleanor J. (1994). Does Psychology have a Future? **Psychological Science, 5(2)**, 69-76.

Helgeson, Vicki S. (1994) Relation of Agency and Communion to Well-Being: Evidence and Potential Explanations. **Psychological Bulletin, 116(3)**, 412-428.

James, William. (1879). Are we automata? **Mind, 4**, 1-22.

Kohlberg, L. (1981). **The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice**. San Francisco: Harper and Row.

Lewin, Kurt. (1951). **Field Theory in the Social Sciences**. New York: Harper & Row.

Minuchin, Salvatore; et al. (1967). **Families of the Slums**. New York: Basic Books.

Moffett, Patrick S. (1972). **A Study of Agency**. (Unpublished Dissertation: New School for Social Research).

_____. (1984). Marginality and Religious Life: Belonging to a Group Called to Risk. **Review for Religious, 43(6)**.

_____. (1987). Contesti per l'autogestione, svilupparsi, crescere. **Psichiatria dell'Infanzia e dell'Adolescenza, 54(3)**.

_____. (1991). Contexts for Growth. **Residential Treatment for Children and Youth, 8(3)**. New York: The Haworth Press.

Piaget, J. (1948). **The Moral Judgement of the Child**. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Sullivan, H.S. (1953). **The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry**. New York: Norton.

APPENDIX

A GRADIENT OF BELONGING

Acceptance

Acceptance implies some clear manifestation that in the eyes of those in the new reference group, I belong in this group.

Clarifying the distinction between being in or out of a given group is a very significant aspect of the process of belonging. The research on initiation rites suggests that the initial sense of acceptance is a correlate of the salience, and sometimes the painfulness, of the entrance ordeal. Here, as in other instances, the customs of street gangs and scouts highlight some of the dynamics involved. Rituals of initiation and concrete symbols of membership leave no doubt in the mind of the new member that he or she is now a member of the "Savage Skulls" or of Troop 138. At Boys' Town the act of being accompanied to my villa and being shown my personal spaces are significant. The first real indication of my "citizenship" is when I am hired as a waiter or street cleaner or clerk.

The signs of acceptance are not enough. In fact, the reality of the acceptance is not enough. What is essential is my acceptance of the fact that the others are acknowledging my place among them. Seeing signs of being accepted and later experiencing myself as being accepted are only the beginning of the process of establishing whether or not I belong. Having a place to be and having something to do can become the starting point for asking, "Do I really want to belong here?"

Involvement

For the first ten days after admission to one of the "towns," a young man is a guest. He is not permitted to work. Should he pick up a broom or a plate to help out, he is reminded of his status as guest. On the tenth day the boy is approached by the mayor or his commissioner of labor and asked if he wants to become a citizen. "Which means? -- It means you accept a job and you begin to earn the scudi (town currency) necessary to pay room and board, town taxes, fines, and to buy your school supplies, soap, toothpaste, etc. plus have something left over for candy, soda or for deposit in your bank account." Choosing to participate is related to expectancies -- both my own expectancies and those of the other group members. A sense of reciprocity comes early in the process of moral development. I expect to pay for what I get. I am suspicious of gratuity. I've learned the hard way perhaps that people expect some form of return for their kindnesses. In new situations, being on the receiving end too long makes me uneasy. I am much more comfortable when I feel I can do my share of whatever needs doing. It's not that I like to work-- it is just that I don't like to be in debt, especially in debt to someone I really do not know well enough to trust.

Being the guest can be fun at first, but eventually, if I plan on staying around, I want to establish my

own place in this social system. Community membership begins when I begin to participate in the tasks of the group as if I were a group member. Participating in the activities of a group is the beginning of an extension of the sense of self. I define my "self" not only in terms of central personal factors but also in terms of environmental factors. I am of this nationality, born in this place, a member of this family, this religion, this group. When I begin to act as if I were a member of a given group, I am actually engaging in the psychological task of establishing myself as being "one of them," or at least testing the possibility and appropriateness of membership.

In this process the expectancies of others become very significant. Adults and peers who make demands on me are, in effect, proclaiming that I belong in this family, this group, this community and thus have a job to do and a role to play in its continued existence.

Sharing in the work of the group, its joys, its pains, its development, confirms my membership. Participation thus becomes a form of communication by which I proclaim to myself and those around me that I am beginning to see myself as belonging here. The young citizen begins to affirm his acceptance in and acceptance of Boys' Town by becoming involved in the daily activities of the town, by doing that which a citizen does: rise, wash, make his bed, visit the chapel, clean the house, sweep the streets, eat breakfast, go to school, participate in the assembly, the activities, the sports programs, wait on tables, play cards, go to bed. On the basis of the work he does during the day including school performance, each young citizen receives a daily check issued by the commissioner of labor. The checks are cashed in the bank where the citizen is also expected to pay his daily bills -- room and board, unemployment insurance, town taxes . . . .

The paper work for this endeavor is considerable and involves a number of the citizens in the verification of work, the computation of wages and the distribution of pay checks. The daily task of preparing and distributing the checks passes from citizen to citizen so that each has a turn at giving to his peers that which is the official recognition and compensation for the work done.

Engagement

Authentic engagement in the life of a group characterizes a type of participation which is congruent with the individual's self-concept and personality.

Because of the instability of the adolescent's sense of self and frequent variations in the modes of presenting this self to others, the quality of engagement in the life of the group is frequently in flux. In the early stages of membership there is considerable positioning. I want to let them know that I'm strong, skilled, able to take care of myself -- often just the opposite of what I am feeling. As I become more comfortable with the group I can become more authentic.

Occasionally in the process of positioning, I create an image of myself that becomes my accepted and expected role in the group. I become for the group the clown, the leader, the wise guy, the intellectual, the head, the jock, the rebel, the saint. An identity gives security, creates a mode of being

in the group, and reduces ambiguity. I need to be somebody in this family, group or community. Even a negative identity is better than no identity at all.

The cognitive dissonance of such in authentic engagements motivates change. I may choose to identify with the stereotype, I may try to change my image within the group, or I may simply physically, socially or emotionally remove myself from this social context. To attain a significant level of authentic engagement, the adolescent often requires a context in which it is possible to work through these psycho-social operations. Such a context is characterized by both solidity and fluidity -- the space needed for experimentation and redefinition.

Here youth gangs provide an interesting counter example. While there is certain movement within the structures of the gang (i.e., a variety of roles and services), there tend to be rather rigid boundaries with respect to behaviors that would be visible outside the group. Should I discover that I no longer really feel like a "Savage Skull," I soon learn that movement out of the group is unacceptable. Brutal exit rituals discourage departure. Death is a too frequent consequence of a gang member's decision to change.

Blocking of growth into authenticity may be less obvious in other social groups but not necessarily less effective. To maintain the cohesion of the system, individuals are constrained to assigned roles. Growth on the other hand requires a social context that accommodates the trial and error of an identity-search.

There is also a need for peer interaction that affords what H.S. Sullivan (1953) labeled "reflected appraisals" and "consensual validation." The adolescent, for example, needs the feedback from peers on the presentation of self and on the consequences of various styles of behavior. In later adolescence, there is an increasing need for reflective time to process this feedback and to examine and re-examine my personal authenticity within the context of the various systems that form part of my extended sense of self: family of origin, foster family, youth community, church, ethnic group, nation, as well as my intended future, profession, family, etc.

At Boys' Town, movement from "involvement" to "engagement" will be noted in the way the young citizen goes about his daily activities. Increasingly he acts not simply because "that's what one does" or simply through rote but rather because these actions have become for him a matter of "propriate striving," an authentic and dynamic expression of his expanded sense of self as one who belongs.

The difference is subtle but important. It is often noted in an increased use of the first person plural as the young citizen takes on the not infrequent task of showing a visitor around Boys' Town and explaining how "we" run "our" bank, store, restaurant, government.

The assumption of supervisory positions in the various activities also serves to foster the sense of engagement and eventually a sense of ownership. Teaching a new citizen how to serve at table, wash a floor or cash his paycheck helps both to maintain the system and to insure growth in leadership. The preparation of new lawyers for example is the responsibility of the chief justice. Well prepared

lawyers make his work easier and assure that one day he will have a qualified successor.

Ownership

Ownership, with respect to a social system, suggests a form of personal engagement that renders the individual responsible for its maintenance and re-generation. Ownership, with respect to personal becoming, suggests a form of engagement in which I assume responsibility for my own development, my behavior, my choices. It is in the process of incorporation that these two aspects of responsibility come together. Actively involved in working out who I am within the context of these others, I begin to accept increasing responsibility for both myself and the family, group or community. Such a sense of responsibility and consequent ownership is fostered in an environment which invites and even demands my participation in the decision-making that regulates the life of the family, group or community.

Allport (1955) speaks of a transformation from the "must-consciousness" of childhood to the "ought-consciousness" of adulthood. Piaget's (1948) studies of the "rules of the game" clarify the place of rule-making in this process of moral development.

Movement out of the super-ego functioning of childhood obedience into adult forms of conscience and personal decision-making is promoted by engagement with others in the development of the rules that moderate our ways of being with each other (Kohlberg, 1981). It is through our mutual agreements about where is out-of-bounds? what are the sides? who calls the shots? that external sanctions give way to internal motivation; experience of prohibitions and fear give way to preference, mutual-respect, personal and group values.

As I assume roles of increasing responsibility within a community, the needs of the group increasingly become my needs. I am concerned about our reputation, about the actions of the younger members, about the bonds that hold us together, the customs we share, the projects in which we are engaged, our future. Because of this bonding, this loyalty, my activities on the part of "us" become a significant expression of the project of my own becoming. My incorporation into this social context is, in part, the realization of my larger sense of self.

Often it is after a citizen has left a higher office such as commissioner, mayor, or chief justice that he begins to explicitly demonstrate a heightened sense of responsibility for the future of the town -- a sign of movement into that fourth stage of belonging which we have termed "ownership." His observations during the assembly will take the form of encouraging participation, of being "scandalized" by the carelessness or lack of generosity on the part of some citizens (usually a clique of 15-16 year olds), of a call to seriousness about the law and its applications, of concern about the public image of the town, of support for those who have newly accepted the work of leadership.

N.B.

As with all stage models, it needs to be said that the various phases are not distinct and movement is not unidirectional. There can be moments of regression and other moments when some of the youngest members of the community distinguish themselves as more genuinely "belonging" then some of the old-timers who should be setting the example. Nevertheless, this gradient of acceptance, involvement, engagement and ownership derived from the experiences of staff and the sharing of older citizens serves as a means of communicating among ourselves about the growth of the individuals and the state of the community.